

A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF CASTLE AND MANOR PARKS AND GARDENS NEAR AND AROUND BUCHAREST. CASE STUDY OF THE CATARGIU ESTATE IN MAIA

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Abstract

In between the 18th and early 20th century a large number of castles and manors with parks and gardens were built near and around Bucharest, particularly north of the city and near main roads and rivers. Together, these ensembles define a network and cultural landscape of peri-urban noble estates similar to other around big cities in Romania (eg. Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș, Timișoara etc.) or along several historical and commercial routes such as the Prahova or Mureș river valleys or the road from Bucharest to Iași, and, to a certain extent, to other networks of castles and manors with parks and gardens such as those near Paris and the Loire valley, Florence, Rome etc. Either in communism, yet also after 1989, many of these sites were destroyed, their parks were fragmented into multiple properties, their buildings dismantled or left to decay etc. The following paper thus aims to address both the nowadays cultural landscape defined by the remnants of these ancient estates, as well as to emphasize on the importance of one of the oldest manors and its park at Maia.

Key words: Bucharest, Catargiu, cultural landscapes, garden history, historic monuments, Maia

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the commune of Maia, specifically the Catargiu Estate (now in ruins) and aims to emphasize the cultural and landscape values of the site and, moreover, on the importance of the preservation of its immovable, particularly landscape, elements.

Although only a handful of archival sources and more or less recent studies refer to Maia and its surroundings, its listed monuments and protected trees, as well as its (yet) not protected park and the village's surroundings represent valuable components of the cultural landscapes around the capital city of Bucharest.

The rapid development of the city of Bucharest, particularly since the 18th century, led to a similarly rapid development of a complex network of castles and manors surrounding the capital-city and/or built adjacent to some of the most important historic and commercial routes (see Monumente Uitate - <https://monumenteuitate.org/ro/>). All these ensembles were surrounded by parks and gardens of different styles and sizes, designed

either by locally, regionally or internationally renowned gardeners or by the owners themselves. Among the noteworthy noble estates of this network (most of which are listed on the Historic Monuments' List - HML) - estates that are situated at varying distances from the capital - include: the Știrbei manor ensemble in Buftea, the Brâncoveanu palace complex in Mogoșoaia, the Ghica manor ensemble in Căciulați, the Lecca-Micșunești manor complex, the Hagianoff manor in Manasia, the Marghiloman manor in Hagiștei, and, among others, the Oteteleşanu castle ensemble in Măgurele.

This network delineates a specific cultural landscape - that of the noble peri-urban estates and the leisure phenomena (*vilegiatura*) from different historical periods - and is similar to other networks and cultural landscapes around major cities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Craiova, Iași, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, or Timișoara) and along various historical and commercial routes (e.g., the Prahova Valley, the Mureș Valley, or the road to Moldavia) (de Roo et al., 2021; Ion, 2011; Ion 2008; Lahovary, 1901; Răducan,

2004). Like the other similar networks, either in communism, yet also after 1989, many were destroyed, their parks were fragmented into multiple properties, their buildings dismantled or left to decay etc. Also, as in the case of all the other similar networks briefly referred to above, the cultural landscape of the peri-urban manors (with parks) around Bucharest is not leveraged and lacks a strategic and integrated approach for development.

The commune of Maia, through the presence of the Catargiu Estate (Figure 1), embodies a part of the expansive network of castles and manors (with parks) that surrounds Bucharest, which notably began to develop towards the end of the 18th century and saw more significant growth in the 19th century (Figures 2-4), but by the mid and late 20th century the estate and all its components were already severely damaged due to a vast number of reasons (not referred to in this paper).



Figure 1. The Catargiu manor's church seen from the area where the manor's ruins are located (source: authors, 2022)



Figure 2. The Ghica manor ensemble in Căciulați (source: authors, 2021)



Figure 3. The Marghiloman Manor in Hagiești (source: authors, 2020)



Figure 4. The Brâncoveanu palace complex in Mogoșoaia (source: authors, 2020)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted following the review of the documentation listed in the bibliography (consisting in only a handful of primary sources, as well as on few publications and recent surveys) and through several *in situ* study visits. Future investigations into additional documentary sources and/or field analyses may reveal new insights regarding the history and evolution of these respective sites, specifically concerning the elements where cultural, natural, or mixed values reside.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On the territory of Maia's Local Administrative Unit, there are several protected sites listed as historic monuments, as well as some legally protected trees.

Historic Monuments

The following listed historic monuments are situated in and around the village of Maia:

- The archaeological site - "settlement" (HML code: IL-I-s-B-14058, period Latène).
- The Church of the "Assumption of the Virgin Mary" with Barbu Catargiu's tomb (HML code: IL-II-m-A-14139, 1778, rebuilt in 1862) (Figure 5).
- The ruins of the Catargiu Manor (HML code: IL-II-m-B-20200, 1820) (Figure 1).



Figure 5. The Church "Assumption of the Virgin Mary" with Barbu Catargiu's tomb, LMI code: IL-II-m-A-14139 (source: authors, 2022)



Figure 6. Fragment of the Catargiu manor's park (source: authors, 2022)

Although not listed as historic monument, an important presence in the current and historical landscape of the village is the old park of the Catargiu Manor (Figure 6). It occupies a significant area at the northern-northeastern edge of the locality's built-up area and retains

numerous plant components and landscape compositions that testify to past designs.

The most important archival document referring to the park is a mid-20th century map from the National Institute of Heritage's archive (NIH archive, Figure 7). It portrays a vast park surrounding the manor and the lake, a few walkways doubled by tree alignments and it divides the park into several functional areas such as the forest-park, the large plantations, the manor's park, the church grounds, the orchard, arable lands, the lake etc. Apart from this map, there are no other dedicated historic or contemporary plans of the park or of any of its functional areas.

Secondary documentary sources identify the author of the first landscaping as the German-origin landscape gardener Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer (Kovacs et al., 2022) who designed several municipal public parks and castle/manor/palace gardens in the Principality of Wallachia, the most famous being the Kiseleff Public Garden (inaugurated 1847), Cișmigiu Garden (inaugurated 1852), the park of the Oteteșanu manor in Măgurele (designed around 1850), and the park on the Cantacuzino domain in Florești (designed around 1850) (El-Shamali, 2012; Mexi and Zaharia, 2020; Mexi et al., 2018; Marcus, 1958 and other).

Although sufficient historical information (plans, images, descriptions, correspondence, etc.) has not been identified to deeply understand the project realized for the park in Maia and its execution in the field, the reviewed bibliography refers to a park of approximately 10 hectares, with stone-paved alleys brought from Germany, fountains built from white marble, a dance area, a "lake pavilion" (Figure 7), a small island, and numerous plant compositions including exotic trees. The image captured in a few period iconographic documents and the elements still preserved on site (e.g., some relief modelling, fragments of alignment plantations, groups of trees, or monumental specimens of exotic trees) can be attributed, by analogy with others similar from parks and gardens listed above, to the landscape gardener Carl Meyer, offering additional arguments regarding the identification of the author of this park and aiding in a better understanding of how the

landscape arrangement was conceived. Among the elements mentioned in archival materials, a significant selection of build elements (e.g., the marble fountain, stone-paved alleys) were not identified in the few iconographic and cartographic documents discovered (Figures 8 and 9), nor today in the current situation *in situ*, requiring in-depth research, including archaeological investigations, for their identification.



Figure 7. The lake pavilion, undated (source: private archive)

Some of those found on site are represented particularly by relief modifications, particularly around the lake and some plant compositions such as fragments of tree alignments (Figure 12) or small groups of ancient trees (particularly *Celtis australis*, *Pinus nigra* – (Figure 11) and *Quercus cerris* (Figure 13), and even one ancient plane tree (*Platanus acerifolia* - Figure 10) near the lake (an exemplar protected by County Council Decision).

The park is preserved in a medium state of conservation and still retains enough valuable components, specifically plantations (including protected trees such as plane trees, relief modelling, the lake, traces of its former alleys and fragments of built vistas). It represents an inseparable component of the old noble ensemble from which only the church and the manor's ruins have been listed, being eligible - according to the national evaluation criteria - for listing as historic monument.



Figure 8. The boundaries of the park captured in the Josephine topographic survey, 19th century (source: mapire.eu)

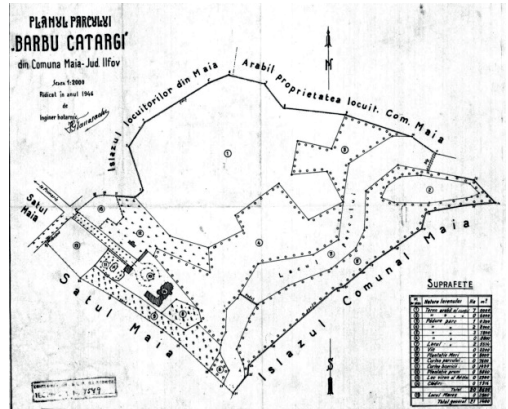


Figure 9. The plan of the Catargiu Manor's park, 1944 (source: NIH archive)



Figure 10. Century-old specimen of plane tree inside the manor's park (source: authors, 2022)



Figure 11. Group of ancient oaks inside the park (source: authors, 2022)



Figure 13. Group of ancient pine trees inside the park (source: authors, 2022)



Figure 12. Traces of tree alignments in the Catargiu Manor's park (source: authors, 2022)

CONCLUSIONS

The Catargiu manor ensemble is located in the northeast part of the locality of Maia and is today composed of two components easily visible on site: (1) the church (listed as historic monument) and the park (not listed) and (2) the ruins of the manor itself (listed as historic monument). It differentiates from the rest of the village through the size of the parcels that compose it, through topography and its relationship with the water surface, and through the density and diversity of the vegetation. Although in the past the ensemble was well connected with the fabric of the village, as it can be easily observed in historic maps of the area, today this connection is somewhat visible only in the area adjacent to the church and of the park (Figure 14). On the other hand, the manor's park represents a transitional element between the meadow landscape, the water bodies, and the agricultural area from the north-northeast of the locality.

The noble ensemble is identified as a distinct landscape unit in which mixed values reside, predominantly cultural: historical, architectural, urbanistic, landscape, and memorial.



Figure 14. Satellite image capturing the Catargiu manor ensemble (including the park - in the centre) and its relationship with the agricultural landscape, water bodies, and the built fabric of the village (source: google earth)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2021-0403, within PNCDI III.

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